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For immediate release

## Uniting Church President Responds to Santoro's comments in Senate Debate

Uniting Church President, the Reverend Dr. Dean Drayton has responded to criticism of his participation in the Workplace Relations debate by Senator Santo Santoro by reminding him that the Uniting Church has always been on the side of justice and equity particularly for the poor and the marginalised.

“In 1977 when the Uniting Church was formed it said in its inaugural Statement to the Nation: *‘We pledge ourselves to hope and work for a nation whose goals are not guided by self-interest alone, but by concerns for the welfare of all persons everywhere.’*”

“We have a history of speaking out against policies which we believe damage the fabric of Australian society regardless of which party is the source of that policy,” Rev. Drayton said.

“The Uniting Church Submission to this inquiry was based on the 1994 National Assembly Call for Justice Concerning Employment, which stated that: *‘the market is not an adequate way of organising paid employment, since not everyone has equal power in the market.’*”

“We do not take party political positions; we take positions that stem from our understanding and commitment to the gospel. The Uniting Church remains concerned at the plight of Australians under the Industrial Relations Reforms being proposed by the Government. We are concerned the Government is unwilling to concede that employers will always hold the balance of power over vulnerable and low-paid workers.

“While it’s pleasing to see the head of the Fair Pay Commission is a committed Christian, it’s plainly wrong in a multi-faith, multicultural society that anybody should be asked to rely on their faith to make decisions that affect the wages of every Australian. It should never be that the personal religious convictions of the Chairperson are a substitute for clear legislative guidelines when it comes time to make just and fair wage decisions on behalf of all Australians.”

Rev. Drayton said that while Senator Santoro is correct in asserting there has been job creation since 1996 he has failed to acknowledge that many of these have been part time or even worse, low paid casual jobs.

“In our submission the Uniting Church argued for people in these very positions – it’s these people we are most concerned for under this legislation, because they could be forced to bargain for their very livelihoods from a position of weakness.”

As Rev. Drayton said at the inquiry, there have been two representations to the Government in the last two years by the National Council of Churches on behalf of the 800,000 Australian children who are growing up in jobless households.

“The combined churches poverty awareness campaign started last year reminded us that despite talk of economic growth and prosperity, there are still 3.6 million Australian households struggling to get by on a combined income of less than \$400 per week.



“With this in mind it’s difficult to see how the job creation and ‘greatly increased welfare support measures’ Senator Santoro cites have had a real impact on the lives of the most vulnerable in this country.”

Dr. Drayton affirmed that Christianity not only be expressed as an individual response to God’s love and care but also in terms of its implication for the way in which our whole society is structured.

“While not all Christians will come to agreement on these matters, this is a public discussion we are obliged to have. As a Uniting Church attendee, I would hope that Senator Santoro also shared this view.”

**ENDS**